

Young people at the heart of Big Local

Listening and responding to young people
And supporting their participation in the area

Report of shared learning event, October 2017, Allenton, Derby



This short report on the event is supplemented by a range of resources and contributions that you can find at www.biglocalallenton.co.uk/biglocalyp. Look out for:

- The young roving reporters' newsletter created on the day and given to delegates
- The video montage of interviews undertaken by the roving reporters
- The PowerPoint slides
- [Tweets on Storify](#) #biglocalyp

The aim of day was to share and build knowledge and skills in involving and engaging young people through Big Local. There were three related themes explored:

1. Young people being listened and responded to and supported by high quality youth work where they live;
2. Young people taking part in doing things through Big Local, taking a lead on activities and projects;
3. Young people contributing to the direction and the running of Big Local.

The event was introduced by one of the oldest and one of the youngest delegates, Edith Lang chair of [Allenton Big Local](#) and Matthew Betesta, co-vice chair of [Big Kirk Hallam](#). Edith welcomed everyone to St Martin's community hall. "This hub is our heritage project and we are grateful to [Derby Homes](#), [Hodgkinson Builders](#) and many contractors and not least Mairi from St. Martin's who are carrying out the work." Delegates took a tour of the site to see progress and how Allenton Big Local helped kick start a project now worth over £500,000. You can find out more and follow the story here: <https://www.facebook.com/AllentonBigBuild/>

54 people took part, including the three roving reporters and 15 young people in the dance troupe after lunch. 29 people completed the evaluation. 93% said they got completely or mostly what they wanted from the day and that the event was excellent or good.

More about the day

Big Local Bingo

We got started by finding out how children and young people are involved in other areas by playing Big Local Bingo. Each of three cards had seven examples of young people's participation in their Big Local area and the winners were the first to find all of these. These ideas are based on the [Hear by Right participation standards](#) helping us build in children and young people's voice and influence at the heart of Big Local rather than bolt it on as an optional after thought. Each card had one example across seven participation standards: Shared values, Style of leadership, Strategy, Staff, Skills and knowledge, Structures and Systems.

Mapping young people's participation

Generating a whole pile of further examples of children and young people activity through and in Big Local, we then mapped them on a large bright orange sticky wall to plot the nature of the activity and how participative it was. The bottom of the ladder on the left starts with tokenism and decoration. It climbs through adults leading toward children and young people leading and working in partnership with adults. Across the top, activities move from listening and responding to children and young people individually or in a group on the left side, through children and young people undertaking specific activity and projects in the middle toward children and young people advising or taking a full part in running things on the right.

Matt Betesta helped the group explore the map and what it told us, including:

- There was a lot of activity where young people are listened and responded to where adults take the lead and involve them in some way.
- There was a good range of examples where children and young people were taking the lead on an activity or project.
- Arising from this, there were a few strong examples where some young people were helping take part in running things.
- We found that there is only a point in looking for young people on the board if Big Local is also really listening and responding to the needs of 100s of young people in the area.
- We found that if there is good connection with 100s of young people then some will have an appetite for taking on projects and doing all sorts of things with and through Big Local.
- We found that it is usually from this group that a young person, much like an adult, may gain interest in Big Local and be keen to help run it by joining the partnership.



Listening and responding to young people's needs

Joe Russo and young people from the [Enthusiasm Trust](#) spoke about their DNA, the principles at the heart of how they respond to the issues faced by young people in Allenton:

- A Team young people know and trust as family
- Invested - taking ownership together for the community
- Legacy – building something bigger than ourselves
- Rooted - in community understanding of what is happening
- Discipleship – I do it you watch, you do it I watch, you do it
- Fresh – fun and exciting, creative and innovative: everyone wants to be there.

Guided conversation at round tables followed looking at three questions:

- How do we know what young people's most pressing issues are locally?
- How do we respond well to young people and involve them in our decision making?
- What makes good youth work in our neighbourhoods and communities?

Some themes from the round table conversations included:

- Understanding children and young people's needs in our communities arises from relationship, continuing connection and conversation – voice not data driven.
- We can use a wide range of approaches, with children and young people involved in exploring the issues and finding solutions with others in the community.
- Finding out what the concerns are is only as good as the community response.
- Strong trusting relationships are at the heart of long term, sustainable approaches.
- We should embrace risk – if you don't try you won't succeed.
- Young people can and should be supported as local activists and campaigners.
- We should be looking for an orchestrated and holistic approach to responding to the needs of children and young people in the area, including with schools and police.
- This is a continuing process, not a once off event, deepening ownership, developing skills, supporting young people's leadership while managing expectations.

Supporting young people in taking action in their Big Local area

Sylvie Humphreys and Amanda Speake told their story of how children and young people have taken part and initiated projects and activities through [Big Kirk Hallam](#).

Guided conversation at round tables followed looking at three questions:

- What is the range of activities young people can take on to contribute to their Big Local?
- How can young people be supported in taking on such activity and projects?
- How does our Big Local make sure such involvement is sustained and not a once off?

Some themes from the round table conversations included:

- With a strong basis of relationships with young people, responding to their needs and concerns, many are quick to take up opportunities afforded through Big Local to get involved in projects and activities, to contribute, devise and lead.
- Children and young people taking part in school and community activity is best seen as a progression and not a once off, growing their interest, knowledge and skills.
- Children and young people are often very community minded, equally passionate about matters affecting other people as well as themselves directly.
- Support to children and young people taking part and leading projects may well include financial backing, skills development, peer mentoring, apprenticeships and volunteering.
- Sharing with and being valued, rewarded and thanked by the community are vital.

Gaining young people's participation in running Big Local

Matt Betesta described his own journey from youth club member, through taking on a key part in developing the skatepark project to being voted onto the partnership at the AGM and being put forward as co-vice chair of the Big Kirk Hallam partnership.

Guided conversation at round tables followed looking at three questions:

- In what sorts of ways can young people help to run their Big Local?
- What if any additional considerations and support need to be in place?
- How can Big Local be an example of best participative practice locally?

Some themes from the round table conversations included:

- Involvement in running things can be by being on the partnership board but also through parallel or advisory groups, like ambassadors, youth forums and informal meetings.
- Young people can be involved in allocating and determining spend through participatory budgeting or dragon's den type activity separately or alongside adults.
- It is important to maximise opportunity for children and young people in a meaningful way, with transparency, support and clarity of expectation.
- Involving young people in running Big Local is essentially no different to involving anyone else; it's just all the more important to do things right, with appropriate policies and procedures in place such as safeguarding, expenses, support and rewards.

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Reflections about the day

Here are some of the comments and feedback about the event.

Which parts of the day did you find most useful?

- All of it!
- Meeting people from other Big Local areas and hearing their stories – inspirational especially those from young people and how they are involved in decision making.
- Bingo game increased our understanding of what other people were doing in their area.
- “Our DNA” - insights into Enthusiasm’s youth work in the Allenton area.
- Discussion groups, networking and groupwork sharing of ideas and practice.
- The sticky wall mapping young people’s participation.
- Listening to other area’s projects like the [passport journal](#) from Big Kirk Hallam.

What are you taking back to your Big Local area?

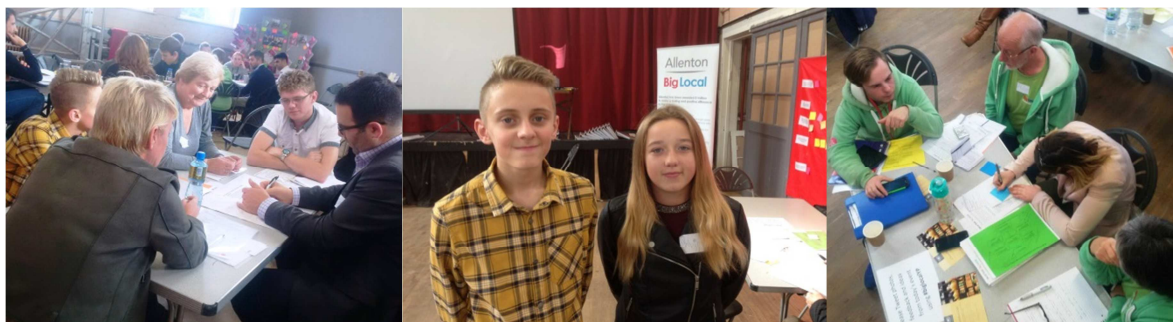
- All of it! Lots of information and new ideas.
- Contacts – the enthusiasm of all the people we met.
- That we can involve youth much more, including on the partnership board.
- Energy and ideas on how to enhance our work to get young people actively engaged and making decisions.
- That “youth participation is messy” and always work in progress.
- Information on successful clubs, events and projects, like the [Kirk Hallam skatepark](#).

Some other comments

- It was a wonderful day. A super day of which we've been proud to be involved in.
- The day was a triumph and a real display of invested partnerships working seamlessly for a common goal.
- I continue to be amazed at what can be achieved when we all work together. At St Martin’s we are very fortunate to have a great team working on this project....and I am so glad the day went well. I thoroughly enjoyed it.
- Lots of ideas - some in progress and some new for looking into. This oldie enjoyed it.

And a last word about how one young person was fired up by the event

“Quick update I had to share. Rose (name changed) asked me when my next meeting was with our Big Local and I explained it was next Wednesday to discuss a Christmas day meal for residents. She asked if she could come and be part of it. Basically I'm saying, because of her greater confidence, this event took a girl from 100 (knowing about her Big Local) onto 10 (taking part in her Big Local) and now it seems to 1 (helping run her Big Local). Thank you.”



Report prepared by Bill Badham, Big Local rep, October 2017, bill@practicalparticipation.co.uk.

Please contact Bill for any further information and more details on the Bingo and Sticky Wall exercises if you would like to use them.

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